



# Teaching Philosophy

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# Designing Student Reflections to Enable Transformative Learning Experiences

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*Abstract:* Many philosophy instructors want their students to change the way they think about and act in the world. Reflection can be one way to bring this about, yet it is common for student reflections to fail to enable this desired transformative learning experience. Our research investigated how instructors can design better reflective assignments to cultivate a more transformative learning experience for students. Using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method, we analyzed student reflection data to identify themes and patterns of student work. Findings include concrete guidelines for cultivating better student reflections, including: designing for reflection, explicitly limiting summary, and incentivizing students to make specific claims while bringing personal experience to bear.

## *Introduction*

Many students taking an “Introduction to Philosophy” class will take few, if any, other philosophy classes in their lives. Thus, for many instructors, it is important for an introductory (Intro) course to do more than provide information to students about a discipline that they likely know little about. Many instructors, ourselves included, want our students to recognize how philosophy connects to their worlds and everyday lives. We want our students to *do* philosophy in addition to knowing about philosophy. Ideally, students are transformed as a result of what they have learned in an Intro philosophy class, changing the way they think about or act in the world. This is the kind of transformative learning experience many instructors, whether teaching philosophy or other disciplines, seek to provide for students.<sup>1</sup>

While there are many definitions of transformative learning, they generally point to the idea of shifting the way in which an individual views the world around them, and for our purposes, this general un-

# Diversity Is Not Enough: The Importance of Inclusive Pedagogy

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*Abstract:* In philosophy, much attention has rightly been paid to the need to diversify teaching with regard to who teaches, who is taught, and which authors and questions are the focus of study. Less attention, however, has been paid to inclusive pedagogy—the teaching methods that are used, and how they can make or fail to make classes as accessible as possible to the diverse students who enter them. By drawing on experiences from our own teaching as well as research on student-centered, inclusive best practices, we advocate for five principles of inclusive pedagogy: fostering a growth mindset, examining inclusive conceptions of authority, promoting transparency, encouraging flexibility, and, finally, continually promoting self-reflection for both students and teachers.

## *1. Diversity and Inclusivity: An Introduction Locating Ourselves*

For good reasons having to do with unjust exclusions, there is an active and vigorous discussion about the need to diversify philosophy curricula and persons who compose our discipline. These kinds of diversity are necessary in order to account for multiple philosophic voices and perspectives and to undo the historic injustice of excluding them. However, as much as diversifying the curriculum, the professoriate, and the student body are critical and necessary, this particular focus on diversity is not sufficient. For instance, even a philosophy

# Philosophy through Computer Science

DANIEL LIM

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*Abstract:* In this paper I hope to show that the idea of teaching philosophy through teaching computer science is a project worth pursuing. In the first section I will sketch a variety of ways in which philosophy and computer science might interact. Then I will give a brief rationale for teaching philosophy through teaching computer science. Then I will introduce three philosophical issues (among others) that have pedagogically useful analogues in computer science: (i) external world skepticism, (ii) numerical vs. qualitative identity, and (iii) the existence of God.

## *Varieties of Interaction*

Can anything good result from an interaction between philosophy and computer science? The short answer is: “yes!” Though it may be surprising to some, philosophy played a critical role in the development of computer science in the twentieth century.

In the 1930s, Claude Shannon, at the suggestion of his adviser Vannevar Bush, spent his time as an electric engineering graduate student at MIT coming up with a systematic theory for circuit design. Interestingly, Shannon’s inspiration (and primary reference) in developing his theory was not an engineering text, but a philosophical one—George Boole’s *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought*. By introducing Boolean algebra, Boole was attempting to give a mathematical formalization of human cognition. That is, he was trying to come up with a precise language to describe how humans think. Philosophers (at least as far back as Aristotle) had been obsessing over this for centuries, so Boole’s work can be seen as one of the more recent fruits of this philosophical tradition.

Shannon’s breakthrough was grounded in the observation that there is a tight isomorphism between the binary character of Boolean algebra and the electrical switches that govern circuits. This isomorphism is what made it possible to systematically treat circuit design and lay the

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## Reviews

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### **Dialogue on Consciousness: Minds, Brains, and Zombies**

John Perry

Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2018; pbk, 91 pp., \$18.67; ISBN 978-1-62466-736-7

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MARINA PAOLA BANCHETTI-ROBINO

John Perry's *Dialogue on Consciousness: Minds, Brains, and Zombies* is the third in a series of dialogues designed to introduce students to central questions in philosophy. The other two dialogues in the series are *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* and *A Dialogue on Good, Evil and the Existence of God*, all published by Hackett.

*Dialogue on Consciousness: Minds, Brains, and Zombies* discusses, in an amazingly short number of pages, some of the major philosophical theories that have been proposed to address the mind/body problem. These theories include Cartesian dualism, property dualism, materialism, epiphenomenalism, and the problem of other minds. The material is addressed in the form of an ongoing dialogue between three fictional characters who represent various points of view regarding the mind/body problem. The characters are Gretchen Weirob who is a philosophy professor at a small college, Dave Cohen who is one of her students, and Sam Miller who is a local minister and friend of Gretchen's. The three characters regularly meet at Gretchen's home to have lunch and discuss philosophy. The dialogues take place every other day over the span of one week, with each chapter representing one of the days. There is a short introduction at the beginning that presents the characters, sets the context for the dialogues, and briefly states what the topic of the dialogues will be. There is also a bibliography at the end that lists the books and authors to which the dialogues referred, as well as suggestions for further reading on the topic of the mind/body problem. Finally, there is a very useful glossary that clearly defines the terms of art used in the dialogues. I will discuss the contents of Perry's book and will conclude the review by evaluating the appropriateness of the book for philosophy courses at different levels.

The first dialogue takes place on a Monday and serves to provide some of the background knowledge upon which the rest of the dialogues will depend. There is a discussion of Cartesian dualism, with Weirob trying to convince Miller that this is an untenable theory because it is incompatible with what we currently know about the brain and how it works. Weirob defends alternatives to Cartesian dualism, being careful to establish that she is not an eliminative materialist. The dialogue proceeds back and forth, mainly between Weirob and Miller, with Cohen making some interjections and each person providing arguments to

Sorensen's first treatment of the Dish Duty puzzle appeared in the UK *Independent* in 1999.)

Sorensen's book thus has an obvious teaching role: Potential philosophy majors (or first-year graduate students) could work on this book in parallel with a required text for symbolic logic. (I know I would have enjoyed such a supplementary text, in parallel with—and in the spirit of—Henle, Garfield and Tymoczko's text, *Sweet Reason*.) And Sorensen's treatment of topics, it's worth adding, carries his characteristic verve and wit.

Now then, to return to the puzzle which headed this essay: Sorensen offers a third dish-duty allocation strategy: "Use two decks of cards, His and Hers. She secretly chooses a subset of the deck that has the same number of red and black cards. [He does] the same with [his] deck. We then pool these two subsets and shuffle. . . . Now neither [person] can predict when the deck will run out" (262).

True enough, this proposal eliminates free riding. And yet, since there's no upper bound on the number of cards in the resulting duty deck, it's possible that a person could end up doing dishes five nights in a row. And the possibility of resentment rears its head once again.

Is it possible that we're stuck in an unsolvable dilemma? For: (1) A coin (as statisticians would say) has no "memory" of past flips—and thus could possibly (albeit improbably) yield a resentment-inducing streak of heads (or tails). But (2) A deck from which cards are dealt (without replacement) has a "memory," thus limiting streaks; and yet, the participants have memories, too—and this gives rise to possible free riders. Is there a path between the horns of this dilemma? I leave this question as an exercise for the fortunate reader of Sorensen's tantalizing and edifying book.

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### **Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics, 4th edition**

Scott B. Rae

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018; hardcover, 522 pages, \$39.99 (USD), \$49.99 (CAD); 978-0-310-53642-0

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#### **BRYAN ELLROD**

Writing an introduction to ethics poses distinctive challenges for an author. The field includes a diverse array of theoretical and methodological approaches and touches upon nearly every aspect of human life. Should introductions, then, prioritize a more encyclopedic survey approach or should they give pride of place to the theory and methodology of the particular author? Where will selections from seminal texts or the consideration of casuistical issues figure in the economy of pages? Scott B. Rae's *Moral Choices: An Introduction*

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**Food Justice and Narrative Ethics: Reading Stories for Ethical Awareness and Activism**

Beth A. Dixon

New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018; hardcover, 192 pages, \$102.60; ISBN 978-1350054547

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ERINN GILSON

Beth Dixon's *Food Justice and Narrative Ethics* is a unique and valuable addition to the growing literature, within philosophy and beyond, on food justice. Dixon aims to develop and "popularize the concept of ethical perception[.]" the ability to perceive the ethically important features of various circumstances (2), as it pertains to the ethical and social justice issues surrounding food and agriculture. The concept and framework she develops, however, can be fruitfully applied to ethical issues in general and valuably so since they broaden the scope of ethical concern beyond individual moral comportment to encompass structural injustice. The text focuses on food justice narratives, the genre of stories about food that seek to enable perception of injustices in the food system and thus increase the ethical skillfulness of their audiences. Throughout the book, Dixon adeptly link three components: 1) explication of the key philosophical concepts and frameworks, 2) case studies of different narratives about food justice, both "master narratives," the socially dominant understandings that are often stereotypical and/or oppressive (6), and the food justice narratives that counter them, and 3) autobiographical reflection. The conjunction of these features makes *Food Justice and Narrative Ethics* distinctive for philosophical writing about food and especially valuable for teaching food justice and/or ethics. I'll briefly review the main argument and themes of the text before assessing its pedagogical uses and value.

The introduction and chapters 1 and 2 lay the philosophical groundwork for the argument by establishing a shared conceptual vocabulary about narrative, ethical perception, and ethical expertise. Dixon proposes that "food justice narratives" function as counterstories that challenge aspects of the dominant "master narratives" about food (7). Food justice narratives are defined by three conditions that are necessary for ethical perception: 1) they describe the particularities of a situation, including the concrete experiences of specific people and relevant contextual details (such as the particularities of place); 2) they engage the audience emotionally and act as a vehicle for the cultivation of ethically appropriate emotional responses; and 3) they are accurate both by describing situations in ways that align with solid evidence and by facilitating an accurate ethical construal or assessment of the situation at hand. These conditions are elaborated clearly in chapter 1 and then consistently applied to the case studies throughout the text. This consistent application is particularly helpful pedagogically by offering an effective model for students of how to apply philosophical concepts and theoretical